Basso - Swan Districts versus West Perth at Bassendean Oval in 1964.

Basso2 – Swan Districts versus Claremont at Bassendean Oval in 1964.

Basso3- South Fremantle’s Nicky Winmar flies for a mark at Bassendean Oval in the 1980s.

Clar- The Claremont president helps clean up Claremont Oval after celebrating the 1964 premiership.

Clar2- Maurie Jones is helped off the ground at Claremont Oval in 1965.

Freo - The original Fremantle Football Club playing at Fremantle Oval at the turn of the century.

Freo2- South Fremantle’s John Gerovich takes a trademark spectacular mark at Fremantle Oval in 1960.

Freo3 – Boys stand on their bikes to peer over the fence at Fremantle Oval in the early 20th Century.

Lath - An East Fremantle player marks on the boundary line at Lathlain Oval in 1964.

Lath2- Perth’s John King and Barry Cable have fun at training at Lathlain Oval in 1963.

Lath3-Perth fans at Lathlain Oval in 1959.

Leed- West Perth versus East Fremantle at Leederville Oval in 1960.

Leed2- A fan asks West Perth’s Brian Foley for an autograph at Leederville Oval in 1959.

Perth - East Perth and East Fremantle contest the ball at Perth Oval 1965.

Perth2- East Perth and East Fremantle contest the ball at Perth Oval 1965.

Perth3- Polly Farmer in action for East Perth at Perth Oval in 1960.

Perth 4- East Perth fans at Perth Oval in 1959.

<h2Perth Oval: Chestnuts, plane flights and Royal rumbles</h2>  
  
<p>The tale of Charlie Chandler’s tree blossomed in the late 1950s but it was the chestnut’s failure to flower in 1961 that made the myth a legend.</p>  
  
<p>The famous tree was a Perth Oval landmark for many decades, but the significance of its rare blooming was not recognised until Chandler, a returned World War II soldier and rabid East Perth supporter, identified several serendipitous events.</p>  
  
<p>Chandler made the tree a barometer of East Perth premiership chances when he pointed out that, after many years without a flower, it had blossomed in 1956, 1958 and a year later.</p>  
  
<p>They were all seasons that the Royals won the flag as a cohort of outstanding players in Graham “Polly” Farmer, Ted “Square” Kilmurray and John K. Watts combined superbly under inspirational coach Jack Sheedy.</p>  
  
<p>East Perth were red-hot favourites in 1961, having beaten Swan Districts four times in the season, but the tree would not flower.</p>  
  
<p>The bare tree proved a powerful omen.</p>  
  
<p>Swans would go on to win the premiership, while the fact that Chandler’s tree had refused to blossom soon became a totem of the club’s rotten decade in which it made the grand final six times but lost each one of them.</p>  
  
<p>The 1960s were a period of lost opportunities and a stark contrast to East Perth’s early days at Perth Oval when the ground regularly hosted the grand final and interstate matches.</p>  
  
<p>Accepted into the competition in 1906 — with only West Perth voting against their inclusion to ignite a bitter rivalry that exists to this day — East Perth soon moved to the then Loton’s Park on the outskirts of the CBD where they would build a WAFL empire.</p>  
  
<p>Phil Matson, a brilliant player at four WAFL clubs who would prove an even more formidable coach, was the catalyst.</p>  
  
<p>He steered the club to five consecutive premierships from 1919, had a successful year in Victoria before returning to win two more flags and could have achieved anything in the game but for his death in a car crash at the age of 43.</p>  
  
<p>Sheedy won three flags and returned for one season in 1969 when Perth Oval witnessed a series of remarkable events only two years after it was passed over in favour of Subiaco Oval as the site of WA football’s headquarters.</p>  
  
<p>It was the year the mercurial Mal Brown won the Sandover Medal to make the first of a series of indelible marks on the game, while East Perth’s standing as the league’s most popular club was underlined when more than 20,000 fans packed the ground early in the season.</p>  
  
<p>The Foundation Day match against West Perth then drew a remarkable 26,760 spectators to smash the WAFL home-and- away attendance record.</p>  
  
<p>It was the biggest crowd at the ground since 1928 when it appeared most of Perth turned out to watch Bert Hinkler take off on the first solo flight from Australia to England.</p>  
  
<p>Chandler’s tree did not flower when East Perth won the 1972 flag, though there was plenty of colour that night when captain-coach Brown led a player walk-out during the celebrations because the recently retired Derek Chadwick was denied access to the official function.</p>  
  
<p>East Perth would remain at the ground for two more decades but the glory days were over.</p>  
  
<p>After a period at the WACA Ground, the Royals shifted to Leederville.</p>  
  
<p>Perth Oval would be redeveloped as a rectangular stadium that would host the Perth Glory soccer club and the Western Force rugby union club.</p>

<h2>Fremantle Oval: Home of WA football’s most remarkable performance</h2>  
  
<p>It remains the most remarkable individual performance in WA football history.</p>  
  
<p>Bernie Naylor, the outstanding South Fremantle full-forward famous for his arrow-straight torpedo punt kicks, launched 29 shots at goal against Subiaco one fine August day in 1953.</p>  
  
<p>All but six hit their target, but after kicking 23 goals to smash the WA record and equal the best for anyone around the country, Naylor refused to accept any more passes and spent some of the game leaning on a goalpost.</p>  
  
<p>He had done enough, as he confirmed with the modesty of his comments after the slaughter.</p>  
  
<p>“This is a great day for me but without the assistance of my teammates, I could not have broken the record,” Naylor said.</p>  
  
<p>“They had to get the ball and give it to me. All I had to do was kick it.”</p>  
  
<p>Naylor already shared the WA goal-kicking record in a match with East Fremantle’s George Doig and Claremont’s George Moloney after kicking 19 at Fremantle Oval the previous year and warmed up with 18 goals against the hapless Subiaco three months earlier.</p>  
  
<p>Naylor’s momentous match was the highlight of a career that is likely to receive belated recognition next year with his induction into the Australian Football Hall of Fame.</p>  
  
<p>There was another momentous event at the ground that season, with East Fremantle leaving their half-century home to forge their future at East Fremantle Oval 2km to the east.</p>  
  
<p>And South Fremantle overcame strenuous objections from the usual suspects — police, neighbouring hotels and the Temperance League — to get a liquor licence, an achieve-ment of considerable foresight given the celebrations later that year when the club won the middle leg of its eventual premiership hat-trick.</p>  
  
<p>Fremantle Oval started as Barrack Green, the recreation ground for the Pensioner Guards who supervised WA’s convicts, and soon hosted its first match only two months after the formation of the WA Football Association, the precursor to the WAFL.</p>  
  
<p>It would eventually host four clubs and showcase a century of champions such as Albert “The Great” Thurgood, bitter rivals and great mates Steve Marsh and Jack Sheedy, and modern-day star Stephen Michael.</p>  
  
<p>It was the training base for the Fremantle Dockers for their first 20 years.</p>  
  
<p>The original Fremantle team, which lasted only two years before folding, drew with Rovers in their initial outing despite scoring 11 behinds to their opponent’s five. Under the rules of the game’s first decade, only goals counted towards the result.</p>  
  
<p>Unions replaced the original Fremantle before soon adopting the same name, but they were to last little more than one tumultuous decade before they folded and current teams South Fremantle and East Fremantle came into being.</p>

<h2 >Leederville Oval: The modern arena at the heart of footy history</h2>  
  
<p>Athletics. Boxing. Cricket. Darts. Football. Lacrosse. Rugby. Shooting. Soccer. Tennis. Table tennis.</p>  
  
<p>Add the open-air picture theatre in the 1920s and the regular fire brigade games and Leederville Oval is surely WA’s most versatile sporting ground.</p>  
  
<p>And it could have been so much more than that.</p>  
  
<p>In the late 1950s, West Perth Football Club president Dick Fletcher — whose name remains on the grandstand built at the time — pushed for Leederville Oval to host the 1962 Empire Games as part of a long-term vision to develop the ground into a multi-sport complex and headquarters of WA football.</p>  
  
<p>“(Given) the growing doubt in the minds of football authorities about the future of Subiaco Oval as our football headquarters, Leederville Oval could meet all requirements,” Mr Fletcher said in 1959 to foreshadow the debate of half a century later.</p>  
  
<p>“Leederville Oval could be made a showplace ... it could accommodate 100,000 people.”</p>  
  
<p>Mr Fletcher’s dream was not to be, though the ground has been redeveloped into a much smaller but boutique stadium that is shared successfully by two clubs.</p>  
  
<p>Leederville Oval opened as an official football ground in 1915, only three months after the Gallipoli landing and amid a bitter public debate about whether league football should even be played when World War I casualty lists overshadowed the sport. Then premier — and Subiaco president — Jack Scaddan put the case for the affirmative when he officially opened Leederville Oval.</p>  
  
<p>“Young people need an outlet for their energies and there is no better sport for the purpose”, he said.</p>  
  
<p>But it would be only a few more weeks before public sentiment forced the premature end to the season.</p>  
  
<p>West Perth were the new tenants at a ground that was first used unofficially in 1898 and the Cardinals, as they were before morphing into the Falcons, would remain there for 80 years, until their move north into the heart of their growing metropolitan zone at Joondalup.</p>  
  
<p>The WAFL’s oldest club, born in 1891 from the ashes of the defunct Metropolitans, would have two golden periods at Leederville. They won three flags in four seasons in the early 1930s as goal-kicking machine Ted Tyson spearheaded a powerful outfit.</p>  
  
<p>Their record in playing in 10 consecutive second semifinals from the end of World War II has never been matched.</p>  
  
<p>But only two premierships were delivered in that period, mostly because South Fremantle had the greatest array of talent in WAFL history at the same time, though the presence of Stan “Pops” Heal, Ray Schofield, Ray Scott, Wally Price and John Loughridge meant West Perth may have been beaten but were rarely overwhelmed.</p>  
  
<p>West Perth’s move north preceded the arrival of East Perth and later Subiaco, whose homes were redeveloped from their historic roles as suburban grounds into national and international venues. The co-tenancy may not have been what Mr Fletcher envisaged all those years earlier, particularly the unpalatable thought of his club’s bitter rival East Perth calling Leederville Oval home, but the concept is not far from his dream.</p>

<h2 >Bassendean Oval: Home of hard men, on and off the field</h2>  
  
<p>As a boy growing up in Perth’s western suburbs in the 1970s, there were few prospects more terrifying than catching the train to Bassendean Oval to watch Claremont take on Swan Districts.</p>  
  
<p>The train ride from Swanbourne was straightforward enough, even though the last couple of stops before Success Hill started to bring contact with characters best avoided once the game started.</p>  
  
<p>A three-minute trot down Thompson Road, a right and then left to the main gates on Old Perth Road and you were in the ground.</p>  
  
<p>Then the fun started.</p>  
  
<p>The railway has played a major part in Swan Districts’ history, with Bassendean Oval’s position on the Midland line providing easy access to the city and eastern suburbs, which supplied many of its players over the decades.</p>  
  
<p>Sports were played at the then Bassendean reserve from the early part of the century, but it was the foresight of former South Fremantle player Dick McDonald in the mid-1920s, then a member of the Bassendean Road Board, that saw funds raised to convert Bassendean Oval into a facility suitable for senior football.</p>  
  
<p>McDonald’s vision was to create a league club based in the district, a dream that would come true in 1934 when Swan Districts were admitted to the WA National Football League with their founding father the inaugural president.</p>  
  
<p>McDonald was also recognised with the naming of the 800-seat grandstand in his honour, an historic achievement lost on a small boy whose only ambition was to survive unscathed amid the most threatening football environment of his limited experience.</p>  
  
<p>The RA McDonald Stand was the source of that terror; a wooden stand packed with the most ferocious and vocal supporters whose synchronised foot-stamping played tune to the fortunes of their team.</p>  
  
<p>They had seen dark days — Swans failed to make finals for 15 consecutive seasons after World War II, a record that stood until Peel’s entry to the league nearly half a century later — followed by the most glorious reign as Haydn Bunton’s men won three straight flags from 1961.</p>  
  
<p>Silky Bill Walker, a four-time Sandover medallist, roved alongside Bunton while Test cricketer Keith Slater dominated the ruck and a host of equally hard men, such as Ken Bagley, Tony Nesbit and Fred Castledine, played for keeps.</p>  
  
<p>Swans struggled for success in the 1970s, as did Claremont, but their one or two battles a year at Bassendean were epic contests between two different worlds.</p>  
  
<p>Crowds flocked to witness these encounters, with the crush in the outer only matched by that on the late train, with 10,000 and more fans often squeezed into the ground.</p>  
  
<p>There were nearly that many on the devastating day in June 1976 when Claremont’s Norm Uncle kicked 10 goals, only for Swans’ Mark Olsen to answer with nine as the home team got the better of a 45-goal shootout.</p>  
  
<p>It remains the closest any WAFL match has come to having opponents kick 10 goals.</p>

<h2 >Lathlain Oval: Where Perth at last found premiership glory</h2>  
  
<p>The name Pat Fogarty barely resonates in WA football circles now but it is doubtful that West Coast Eagles would be preparing to move to Lathlain Park next year without the Perth secretary’s foresight more than half a century ago.</p>  
  
<p>Perth were based at the WACA Ground for most of their first 60 years but Fogarty, who was secretary for nearly 20 years before having two stints as president, was long convinced the club would only thrive by moving into the heart of its growing district.</p>  
  
<p>It was a strategy later replicated with great success by West Perth in their shift to Joondalup but a move that attracted significant opposition from Perth supporters in the tough years after World War II.</p>  
  
<p>But Fogarty was adamant — Perth had to move or perish.</p>  
  
<p>He had identified the rudimentary ground at Goddard Street, the geographic centre of a new housing development, as the ideal site for the club and spent much of energies convincing the Perth city council of the value of his vision.</p>  
  
<p>Merely delighted when Perth ended a 48-year premiership drought by winning the 1955 grand final, Fogarty was fulfilled four years later when the club moved to Lathlain Park and took possession of the magnificent grandstand fully funded by the council and named after then president EW Jones, a prominent Perth dentist hence his nickname “Brusher”, and himself.</p>  
  
<p>It meant the club could now have their own liquor licence, a significant financial development given their tenancy at the WACA meant they kept little of the bar takings, a fact noted by the cricket association in 1955 when it congratulated Perth on their flag but regretted their imminent departure. The move to Lathlain could barely have been more successful.</p>  
  
<p>Lathlain, Carlisle and surrounding suburbs were developing rapidly and under the energetic management of colts coach Jack Ensor, who would assemble and organise some of the greatest talent in the State’s history as part of his six premierships in seven seasons, Perth would soon enter the most glorious period of their existence.</p>  
  
<p>The tough and inspirational Mal Atwell was convinced to leave East Perth to coach the club, outstanding players Barry Cable, Bob Shields, Greg Brehaut and Frank Pyke emerged as stars, and Perth became a WAFL powerhouse.</p>  
  
<p>A hat-trick of flags was delivered from 1966 to 1968, with Cable living up to his big game reputation by winning the Simpson Medal in each grand final, while the individual honours flowed on Sandover Medal night with Cable (three times), Neville Beard, Pat Dalton, Ian Miller and Bryan Cousins saluting within two decades of the move to Lathlain.</p>  
  
<p>The 1970s were barely less successful, with consecutive flags in 1976-77 and a heart-breaking two-point loss a year later, but the golden age was coming to an end.</p>  
  
<p>The relationship with the council soured to the extent that Perth returned to the WACA for two seasons in the mid-1980s but the move didn’t work and was soon abandoned.</p>  
  
<p>The Demons have been back at Lathlain for the past three decades with their current 20-year absence from finals the longest in WAFL history, but hopeful that Pat Fogarty’s foresight and the imminent arrival of the Eagles may foreshadow another golden era.</p>

<h2>Claremont Oval: A haven for stars and sheep</h2>  
  
<p>John Hyde’s predicament was typical of the dilemma faced by Claremont throughout much of their early post-World War II history.</p>  
  
<p>A Geelong star who had won two premierships for the Cats and a club champion award, Hyde was Claremont’s gun recruit in 1955 when the Tigers were trying to dig themselves out of a mess on and off the field.</p>  
  
<p>Hyde was put up at the Highway Hotel, a plush watering hole on Stirling Highway often used by visiting celebrities, while he was wooed by the club.</p>  
  
<p>But when he was due to sign a contract with the Tigers during his first visit to his proposed home ground at Claremont Oval, the meeting fell through in the most unusual circumstances. “Sheep had got into the tin shed that served as our change rooms, office and boardroom and had made a complete mess,” Claremont great John O’Connell recalled.</p>  
  
<p>“Here we were trying to sign one of the best players in the country and we were doing it in a building where you wouldn’t keep your dog.”</p>  
  
<p>The soiled premises obviously didn’t dissuade Hyde because he joined the club. O’Connell later went to Geelong, though not as part of any trade, but it was indicative of Claremont’s ground woes in their first four decades.</p>  
  
<p>The sheep were cheap lawnmowers, if prone to awkward side effects, but the tin sheds were a staple for many years after the grandstand burnt down one night in 1944.</p>  
  
<p>Claremont were accepted into the league in 1926, the club evolving from the Cottesloe team that started 20 years earlier, and played their first season at the neighbouring Showground while Claremont Oval was made ready for senior action.</p>  
  
<p>The showpiece was the elegant wooden grandstand which contained a massive concrete bath in the home change room. It was often used by the entire team until it was condemned by health authorities.</p>  
  
<p>Sadly for Claremont, the loss of the grandstand had a marked impact on the club’s fortunes — with distinct parallels to its recent sojourn at the Showground while Claremont Oval was redeveloped.</p>  
  
<p>Numerous theories developed about the cause of the devastating fire, which destroyed most of the club’s records, photos, jumpers, training equipment and even a well-used piano.</p>  
  
<p>The most credible attributed liability to American sailors who often drank at the nearby Claremont Hotel before repairing to the football ground for further refreshments.</p>  
  
<p>It was a cruel blow for a club that had little success in its first decade before becoming a dominant force inspired by coach Johnny Leonard and champion player George Moloney that would play in seven grand finals in as many years and win a hat-trick of premierships.</p>  
  
<p>The stars continued to arrive — Les McClements and Sonny Maffina in the 1940s then Les Mumme, Kevin Clune and Denis Marshall in the 50s — before the establishment of the highly effective junior council in the 1970s. One of the most tangible legacies left by the often controversial but far-sighted Mal Brown saw Claremont develop into one of the powerhouses of the modern game based on the fertile local recruiting zones.</p>  
  
<p>Flags soon came in abundance, players in their dozens were ushered off to the national competition and, after a decade and half of negotiations, the WAFL’s most plush facility was opened on the site of what was once a sheep paddock.</p>